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THE JEWS OF MOLDAVIA AT THE BEGINNING OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY.

AT the beginning of the eighteenth century the Jews were fairly numerous in Moldavia. Their number had increased, especially from the second half of the seventeenth century, in consequence of a large influx of Polish Jews, who had taken refuge in this country to escape the excesses and massacres of the Cossacks during the insurrection of the latter against the Poles.

Prince Dimitrie Cantemir reckons the Jews among the permanent and native inhabitants of Moldavia, who paid their taxes to the royal treasury. They were an important factor in the social and economic life of the country. They inhabited the towns as well as the country districts.

Outside the ancient community of Jassy, which had a large population and which formed the centre of gravity of Roumanian Judaism, the Jewish communities spread everywhere in the country, in the interior as well as on the borders. In the interior, there were the communities of Botoschani, Stefaneschti, Suchava, Campoulung, Tcher-naoutz, Roman, Bacau, Piatra, Niamtz; on the frontier, there were those of Focshani, Galatz, Kilia, Bender, Soroca, Hotin¹. Immigrants constantly came in large numbers to join the Jews established in these communities and to form new communities. Situated on the direct route from Poland to Constantinople, Moldavia was "constantly visited

¹ We give here only the names of communities whose existence is known to us from authentic documents.

by the Greeks, the Armenians, and the Jews who had settled in Polish Russia, and whose principal trade was with Turkey¹. It was also frequented by the Polish Jews, properly so-called, and by those who had settled in Turkey. All of these, attracted by tolerance and induced by commercial interests, all became permanent guests of Moldavia instead of the passing visitors which they had been before. The conventions and treaties which the neighbouring powers concluded with Turkey assured, moreover, to all the subjects of the contracting nations, without distinction of race or religion, full and entire freedom in trade and complete protection for their persons and property. Similar conditions appear again also in the treaty of Pruth, concluded between the Sublime Porte and Russia, after the disastrous defeat of Peter the Great in 1711². The Jews of these two countries profited largely by this treaty.

On the other hand, in consequence of the continual wars, of which Moldavia was the scene, between Turkey and her neighbours, the population dispersed beyond the frontier, whence the majority were slow in returning. The country became depopulated and the number of taxpayers diminished sensibly. The state revenues decreased in proportion and made it impossible for the princes to meet the demands of the Porte and recover the sums which they usually advanced on their nomination to the throne of the country. To increase the population, the princes granted privileges, exemptions, and even certain immunities to natives who consented to return to their homes, as well as to aliens of every nationality and religion, who were invited into the country and who came to settle there. Similar privileges and exemptions were accorded by all the princes who succeeded in turn to the throne of the Principality at the beginning of the eighteenth century. Many districts were thus re-peopled, and signs of prosperity began

¹ Hurmuzaki-Odobescu, *Documente privitoare la Istoria Românilor*, Supl. I, p. 424.

² E. de Hurmuzaki, *Documente*, VI, p. 107 ; IX¹, pp. 457, 458-59.

to appear in the country, as the chroniclers state with lively satisfaction¹.

The Jews benefited by these privileges, exemptions, and immunities. They were treated in the same way as inhabitants belonging to other religions. In the towns which belonged to the state domain—commonly called royal towns (*tirguu domneshti*)—they could occupy without payment plots of ground on which to build houses and shops. They could make free use of the pastures and woods which surrounded these towns. They were granted the same rights in the cities and market-towns belonging to private individuals, generally boyards, on condition of paying the same rents as the other inhabitants. Certain special concessions even were occasionally made to them, since they were excellent intermediaries for attracting large numbers of inhabitants to the districts where they had settled.

What had above all contributed to make the position of the Jews in Moldavia more assured was the cessation of the wars between the Turks and the Poles, which, lasting several centuries, had caused the incursions of the Poles and the Cossacks. The wars against the Austrians, which lingered on both the Servian and Wallachian frontiers, only affected Moldavia very slightly. Freed from the periodical incursions of the Tartars, the Jewish communities were certain to develop more vigorously. At this same time a new enemy, more formidable to Turkey, arose, but the first conflict between the Russians and the Turks, in 1711, had resulted in the complete rout of the former, and the Moldavian Jews were so convinced of the superiority of the Turkish arms, that those of Soroca openly proclaimed their confidence in the final victory, and predicted the speedy defeat of the Russians². Therefore,

¹ M. Kogalniceanu, *Cronicele României sau Letopisetzele Moldaviei si Valahiei*, second edition, II, pp. 84 and 297. Complete edition in three volumes of all the Moldavian chroniclers. We shall from this time mention this work by the name of "Chronicle."

² Hurmuzaki, *Documente*, VI, p. 100. Report of Colonel Baron Tiepolt to Prince Eugene of Savoy.

with the exception of the Jews settled at Bender and in the south part of Bessarabia, who took refuge across the Danube at the same time as the other inhabitants¹, all remained in the country.

The Jewish religion was not officially recognized in Moldavia. "The only religions publicly practised there at that time were those of the Greek church, the Latin church, and the Armenian church²," but there was unvarying tolerance towards the Jews; they were free to build their synagogues where they liked. However, according to Cantemir, they could build them only of wood and not of stone³.

The people seem to have been divided in their sentiments towards the Jews. The inhabitants of Lower Moldavia thought that they were committing no sin when they murdered or robbed the Jews, whom they put, in this respect, on the same footing as the Turks and the Tartars. Yet these same people willingly offered hospitality to Jewish travellers without asking anything in return⁴. On the other hand, the inhabitants of Upper Moldavia, who were less warlike, had little faith, and were more inclined to heresy, seem to have been more favourably disposed towards them. The Jews were looked upon with favour in all cases by the boyards, and even by the priests and monks. Although unbelievers, they were received in the monasteries with the same title and with the same good grace as other travellers, Christians and foreigners, and with their travelling companions, their servants, and their animals, enjoyed a generous hospitality, being at liberty to remain there at will, even for a whole year⁵, an inestimable advantage at that time when the roads were infested with

¹ Hurmuzaki, *Documente*, VI, p. 94. Talman to the Imperial Council of the Austrian War; N. Iorga, *Acte si fragmente cu privire la Istoria Românilor*, Bucarest, 1895, I, p. 314.

² Hurmuzaki-Odobescu, *Documente*, Supl. I¹, p. 421.

³ D. Cantemir, *Descriptio Moldaviae*, p. 243. We quote the Roumanian translation of this work, Iassy, 1851.

⁴ Ibid. pp. 260-61.

⁵ Ibid. p. 303.

robbers or with bands of plundering foreigners, who invaded the country, put everything to fire and sword, and forced all to take refuge in the monasteries, the only fortified places where men and their property were safe.

The chief occupations of the Jews were commerce and the sale of liquor; there were many tavern-keepers among them¹; but they engaged also in all kinds of professions. The indolence of the Moldavians and their dislike to business left the export trade entirely in the hands of the Jews, the Greeks, and the Armenians, all known by the name of *gelepi*. They exported in particular entire herds of large and small cattle to Constantinople and other towns of Turkey, as well as to Poland, Austria, Russia, and Prussia, where they sold them at double or treble the cost price. However, while the Greeks, the Armenians, and the Turks sent its riches permanently out of the country, for, being aliens, they were forbidden to acquire rural or urban estates there², the Jews, as natives, kept these riches in Moldavia. Nevertheless, on account of this wealth, it seems, and also on account of the different religion which they practised, they had to pay a heavier tax than that which was imposed on the other inhabitants of the country³.

The Jews did not pay this tax individually, but in a body, as a corporation constituted and officially recognized by the prince and the authorities in virtue of a *chrisov* (letter patent), renewed by each prince on his accession to the throne. They were, moreover, liable to the grand Camarash to the exclusion of all other officers. Even the payment of ordinary or extraordinary taxes was made through the medium of the staroste (provost) and the

¹ De Cantemir, *Descriptio Moldaviae*, p. 243.

² Ibid. pp. 63 and 244-45; cf. also Hurmuzaki-Iorga, *Documente*, X, Introduction, p. xxii. Prince Cantemir adds that the Jews also could not acquire urban estates; this is not a fact.

³ Ibid. p. 243.

Jewish tchaouchs, no servant of the state having even a distant connexion with it.

For protection against the persecution and the boundless despotism which characterized that period, and to resist more effectively the exactions, official or otherwise, of the princes and boyards, Moldavian Judaism had been more firmly organized from the beginning of the eighteenth century, and perhaps even towards the last quarter of the seventeenth. Up till that time, each community constituted an independent corporation with one or two starostes at its head. These chiefs could effectively defend those whom they represented against the local authorities only. They were more or less powerless against the exactions of the central authority, to which they were moreover obliged to have recourse in order to check the molestation and exactions of the local authorities. These were the causes which led them to found the Hahambashia, the holder of which office was intended to serve as a connecting link between all the communities, and to secure the defence of Moldavian Judaism as a whole.

Communities and individuals resigned their privileges into the hands of the Hahambasha, a lay officer, in whom was vested every power, and who was recognized by the established authorities of the country as the representative and official defender of Moldavian Judaism. Many annoyances, many arbitrary actions, and many exactions could thus be dealt with.

But what protected the Jews of Moldavia from great exactions was the powerful support—still more efficacious since the creation of the Hahambasha—which they found in the Porte, thanks to the co-operation, both moral and material, of their influential co-religionists in Constantinople.

From the second half of the sixteenth century Moldavia had preserved her autonomy in name only. The princes were chosen at Constantinople and removed from the throne at the will of the Vizier and the pachas. For this reason, all the candidates for the Moldavian throne sought help

and the protection, more or less efficacious, of the confidants of the pachas. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, we are told by an authorized witness, there was no politician at Constantinople of any influence who had not his "Hofjude," his Jewish confidant and adviser, in whom he had so boundless a confidence, that he revealed to him his most intimate thoughts and his most secret actions¹. The candidates for the Moldavian throne often had recourse to these intermediaries in order to gain success in their candidature by means of large sums judiciously distributed. Recourse was had also to these confidants to undermine the position of reigning princes, to form plots against them, and obtain their removal from the throne. It was for this reason that the princes were very often careful not to push too far their exactions from the Jews of Moldavia. Submissive and docile as long as the prince or the boyards kept within the recognized limits, the Jews resisted in case of excess. To obtain justice from the prince, they had only to apply to their co-religionists in Constantinople; each complaint, powerfully supported, shook his tottering throne.

The documents in our possession dealing with the first decade of the eighteenth century, do not enable us to estimate exactly the attitude which the princes took up towards the Jews. It seems, however, that the latter were subject to the same fortune and the same reverses as their fellow citizens. The Russo-Turkish war was a cause of misfortune to them. The ruffians whom Prince Cantemir enrolled in the army which went to the assistance of the Russians, disbanded in the country instead of rejoining their regiments, and seized the cattle and sheep which the *gelepi*, among whom were the Jews, were taking to the fairs of Upper Moldavia². After the defeat of the Russians, Cantemir was obliged to take to flight. The vornic Lupu, appointed *caimacam*, extorted large sums from the cor-

¹ Hurmuzaki, *Documente*, VI, pp. 63 and 67. Talman to the imperial Council of the Austrian War.

² Nicolai Muste, *Chronicle*, III, p. 45.

porations and from the Jews of Jassy¹. But Prince Nicolas Mavrocordat, who soon after took up the reins of government, treated them with much kindness. Well informed and enlightened, Mavrocordat had shown that he was well disposed towards the Jews by publishing a history of the Jews. He had known Dr. Tobiah Cohen, whom he introduced at the Court of the great Sultan, and had been a friend of Dr. Fonseca, whom he had known at the Court of Constantinople as well as in the house of the French ambassador. These relations could not fail to influence the attitude of the Prince towards his Jewish subjects. A protector of the poor, the humble, and of foreigners², he protected the Jews also.

At the end of the year 1715, the Porte, to reward his services, transferred Mavrocordat to Wallachia. Michel Racovitza was chosen to replace him on the throne of Moldavia, of which he took possession in February, 1716. His first two reigns³ had left disagreeable recollections in the country. Utterly unscrupulous, Michel Racovitza had burdened all the taxpayers and all the corporations with heavy taxes, even reviving the taxes which had been abolished with anathema. He did not profit by his extortions however. He was dethroned and taken to Constantinople after his second reign, and cast into the prison with seven towers; he was released, but with the loss of a great part of his possessions. His new nomination to the Moldavian throne had cost him very dear. He arrived in the country involved in debt and with the firm intention of rebuilding his fortunes there. As a culminating stroke of misfortune, Turkey was at that moment at war with Austria. An Austrian general had surprised Nicolas

¹ *Chronicle*, II, p. 340; III, p. 50.

² Nicolai Costin, *Chronicle*, II, p. 88. D. Fotino, *Istoria generala a Daciei*, trad. de G. Sion, Bucarest, 1859; III, p. 95.

³ Michel Racovitza reigned for the first time from September 23, 1704, to February 12, 1705; for the second time from November 13, 1707, to October 14, 1710.

Mavrocordat at Bucarest and had taken him prisoner. The Austrians desired to capture Racovitza also; they sent detachments to plunder Moldavia and ordered a captain to bring back the Prince. To ward off the danger which threatened him, Racovitza was obliged to summon the Tartars and spend considerable sums. He revived certain taxes which he himself or his predecessors had abolished with anathema and excommunication, and put in force every kind of exaction against the merchants, to which class the Jews belonged. Moreover, Racovitza had surrounded himself with a multitude of Greeks, who urged him, for their own profit, to oppress and rob the people. One of them, Panaioti, who had been a tavern-keeper at Constantinople, was "a grasping and heartless man, at whose hands all suffered ¹."

The Jews, who during the first reign of Racovitza had in any case to suffer as much as the other inhabitants, now felt more than the rest the weight of the exactions of the Prince and his counsellors. The armed bands of the Austrians and the Tartars had robbed many of them of their possessions. The taxes on cattle, wine, beehives, put a stop to a great part of their trade; the tax on taverns weighed heavily on tavern-keepers. In fact, commerce of every kind received a check. The Jews of Jassy were particularly affected. A great fire broke out in this town in 1725 and reduced to ashes the most important streets, and particularly the High Street, where the merchants had their shops and warehouses ². They had scarcely recovered from the fire, when they had to submit to the pillaging of public officials, who, on the erection of a new church at Olascheni, removed by force the planks, benches, and other objects from the Jewish warehouses. These objects were handed

¹ Ioan Neculce, *Chronicle*, II, p. 362.

² *Chronicle*, II, p. 361; III, pp. 68 and 140. The chroniclers do not especially mention the Jews, but we know from other documents that the Jews of Jassy had almost all their warehouses and shops in the High Street, and lived for the most part in the neighbouring streets.

over to the egoumene Ezechiel of Copou (near Jassy), the administrator of the church, to serve him as materials for building¹.

The exactions and extortions of the Prince and his advisers were to go yet further. Probably encouraged by the silence and docility of the plundered, the Prince gave free vent to his avarice; his evil instincts were aroused. Thinking only of the profit to be gained, Racovitza countenanced an accusation against the Jews of ritual murder. This accusation was accompanied by a violence and an extortion which were this time to bring his irretrievable ruin. The Roumanian chroniclers, so sparing generally of information about the Jews, have preserved for us the story of this affair, which they could the less pass over in silence that it was the principal cause of the dethronement of the Prince. The account of one of the chroniclers is brief and concise, the other, on the contrary, thinks fit to give us all the details as they were invented by the very limited imagination of the originators of the accusation, and probably embellished by the ignorance of those who spread them among the people. As the Roumanian language is unknown to our readers, and as the detailed account of this accusation is not wanting in a certain vicious originality, in spite of the similar accounts which have been handed down to us by the chroniclers of other countries, we give here the exact translation of it.

“On Good Friday, the Jews of Onitzcani² carried off a child of about five years of age and put him in one of their cellars; then all these Jews assembled there—as they them-

¹ *Chronicle*, III, p. 141.

² A little town which has now disappeared, situated in Bessarabia, in the district of Orhei. The chronicler, Ioan Neculce, calls Onitzcani a village; the anonymous chronicler calls it a town. It is evident from the story itself that Onitzcani must have been a town. Only towns had a vornic (mayor) at their head, villages had only a vornicel. Onitzcani is marked in the map of the eighteenth century at the south-east of Orhei (Orgueiew at the present day). In this map only towns and market-towns are indicated.

selves confessed later before the Divan¹—they brought a tub of warm water and washed the child in it. Then these Jews, having sewn the child front and back with a thread, put the child naked in a bath, pierced his body all over with a small pointed instrument and let the blood flow from all his veins; they also tore his eyes out with the sharp tool, and removed all the skin of his face—this was proved when the child was taken to Jassy by order of Prince Michel. He was buried in St. Nicolas (Churchyard). In the bath into which they had made the blood flow, the Jews put a little water. After murdering the child, the Jews gave his body to one of their race, to be thrown in a field, paying him three *ughi* (ducats) of gold for his trouble. This Jew wrapped the child's body in a sheepskin, placed it on a cart, and left it in the field. As to the blood, they divided it in *balerce* (barrels)². They sent one to the Rabbi of Cracow, another to the Rabbi of Dubassar, and buried one in the cellar, saying that it was *vishinap* (cherry cordial).

“Now the parents of the child, who was an only child, had begun to look for him in the town on Holy Saturday, the day of the murder; they visited every house, fearing that he had lingered somewhere or that some Turk had carried him off in order to take him to Bender, as the Turks were in the habit of doing. After having searched everywhere and questioned all in the neighbourhood without finding the child, they lost all hope of recovering him. It was not till Easter Monday that some people, on their way to the town, found the child abandoned in the field by the roadside; they took him up and brought him back to Onitzcani, where they showed him to the people, several of whom recognized him. When the parents heard the news and had seen the body, they began to weep and lament over his innocent death. The vornic (mayor) of Onitzcani

¹ The word Divan has here the meaning of High Court of Justice, which was generally presided over by the Prince.

² The balerca is a barrel which holds sixty-six gallons.

and the father of the child at once gave information to the Serdar¹ Lupul, who was in the neighbourhood, and who came to the place to see the body. All immediately suspected that the crime had been committed by the Jews; they at once arrested the most influential among the Jews, together with their wives, and threw them into prison, sending at the same time a very full report to the Prince.

"The next day the Serdar began to beat them and question them. He began with the man who had left the child in the field, and with the wife of the man in whose house the child had suffered martyrdom. Then he tortured them all in turn, but none of them would make any confession during this first inquiry. However, at the second inquiry, the man who had abandoned the child was the first to confess, declaring that the murder had been committed by two of the Jews in the house of the Jew Leiba (Leon), and that he himself had afterwards received three *ughi* to abandon the child. The Serdar, receiving orders from the Prince, sent these four Jews and their wives to Jassy in a post-carriage. When they arrived at Jassy they were thrown into prison, and the Prince himself questioned them one by one during the night. Three of them confessed voluntarily, but Leiba, the owner of the house, persisted in his denials.

"The next morning the Prince assembled the Divan (the High Court of Justice), and summoned also all the Jews of Jassy as well as the Turks and all the great and lesser boyards. The accused were again examined. The three Jews related before the Divan the facts as they had taken place, describing in what manner they had made the blood flow; they showed also the knives and sharp instruments with which they had stabbed the child, and owned that they had performed this religious sacrament, as they called

¹ The Serdar, at the beginning of the eighteenth century, was the general officer in command of the cavalry of the districts of Lapouchna, Orheiu, and Soroeca; it appears, however, that as early as 1726 the prefects of Orheiu and Soroeca had the title of Serdar. The prefect was an administrative official as well as a magistrate.

it, by order of the Rabbi of Cracow. Then of their own accord, without being compelled to it, they made known the use which was to be made of the blood, saying that on the birth of their children they anointed their eyes with this blood, that they sprinkled the threshold of their doors with it, and put it into the unleavened bread prepared for the feast of Passover, and that this blood was sacred among them. However, as Leiba continued to deny all this, the Prince addressed the Jews and said to them: 'Observe and hear the confession of those who have committed the crime'; and the Jews replied: 'Let them receive the punishment of their crime.' But Prince Michel, instead of punishing them with death, as they deserved, only threw them into prison in order to extort money from them, and commanded the Vel Armash¹ Panaite to have a large divan made next to the Jewish synagogue. He forced the three above-mentioned Jews to sit naked on the divan, had a bath of warm water placed there also, and gave orders that a child of the Jew Leiba, aged five years, should be brought. This child was undressed and put into the bath, after which the Prince ordered the father to wash him. When the father had washed the child, instruments were brought and given to Leiba, to force him to pierce his child's body with them. As the father refused, he was scourged and threatened with death. Then Leiba called the bulucbacha Georges² in a loud voice and said something in his ear. The bulucbacha Georges in his turn came up to the Armash Panaite and repeated in a whisper the words of the Jew. These whispers were to the effect that the Jews promised to pay a certain amount of money. Now as it seemed that the Jews did not offer the required amount, the instruments were again brought and given to Leiba, and he was severely beaten that he might be forced to stab his son; but refusing again, he called the bulucbacha

¹ The Vel Armash, or Great Armash, was the governor of the prisons, and presided over executions.

² The bulucbacha, in reality the bach-bulucbacha, was the chief of the Prince's Guard.

once more to whisper in his ear a message which the Bachbulucbacha delivered to the Armash. The whispering continued in this manner all day. All the inhabitants of the town had assembled also and assisted at this scene. When, at nightfall, the sum to be paid to the Prince had been finally agreed upon, the Jews were removed from the place and shut up in prison until they had paid the promised money. However, a long time elapsed before they could collect the sums which they had pledged themselves to pay, so that the delegate of the Jews of Jassy had time to arrive at Constantinople, where he informed the Jew Raphael, the Bazageambacha (the chief purveyor) of the Vizier, of the affair. This proved the reality of the crime; for the Jews, since they were guilty, hastened to go to the Porte, and brought back a firman which commanded the Prince to release the prisoners. Thus they were set free without paying the money promised (though certain sums were given to the Armash Panaite, to Doctor Caradja, and to the Vel Postlenic Iordaki), and they returned home.

“However, the Jews did not stop at this; they asserted that many articles had been taken from their houses, so that the said Bazageambacha sent Sara-Mechmet Aga, the Vizir-Agasi, with a firman to demand back what had been taken. He made the Serdar and others whom the Jews mentioned to him restore their plunder.

“Now Raphael had taken all this trouble for the good reason that Prince Michel had refused from the first to accede to his request to shut his eyes to the offence of the Jews and release them, and had, on the contrary, written to the Porte to denounce the Jews in order that it might extort money from them. For, eleven years before, during the vizierate of Ali-Pacha, the Jews of Constantinople also had committed a similar outrage on a Turkish child, and the Vizier had hanged three of them. At that time, the Jews had promised the Vizier to pay the Imperial Treasury 1000 purses of money, if such a crime were again committed in any part of the Empire.

"Now Prince Michel had to endure all this on account of his avarice, for he was too eager for the money which he wished to extort from the Jews, to turn to ever-existing justice, as he ought to have done, and to the love of law and religion. And, further, he had not foreseen the result of his action. Shortly after, therefore, the Porte deprived him of the throne¹."

In the absence of documents or of a tradition of Jewish source, it is difficult to find out the origin of this absurd accusation, and to say whether the affair was deliberately arranged, or whether the authorities merely took advantage of the casual murder of a Christian child to accuse the Jews of the nearest district of it, with the purpose of extorting from them enormous sums of money at the same time as a confession. However objectionable the character of Racovitza was, and although the chronicler himself declares that "when he perceived that any one had money, he at once invented a pretext to take it from him²," it is not right to attribute to him the initiative in the accusation. The instigator of the whole affair seems rather to have been the Serdar Lupu, in connivance with the Mayor of Onitzcani and certain other officials, who were afterwards compelled by the aga of the Vizier to make restitution. Lupu, as his title indicates, was prefect of Orheiu, the chief town of the district of the same name, near which was the town of Onitzcani. The Serdar Lupu had found there an unexpected piece of good fortune, such as was sought after by all the officials of the time, to satisfy his rapacity without regard for more remote consequences. Therefore, the body had scarcely been discovered when he hastened to accuse the Jews of the murder, without any further inquiry. He threw them into prison and put them to the torture to force a confession from them. This confession, which was to serve as a

¹ Anonymous Chronicle. *Chronicle*, III, pp. 142-44.

² *Chronicle*, III, p. 142. Cf. also p. 140: "And as soon as he heard that any one had money, he tried every means to get possession of it, with or without the owner's consent."

pretext for his extortions, was difficult to obtain. The first inquiry was unsuccessful, although everything had been deliberately arranged and the rôle of each of the prisoners settled beforehand. A second inquiry, accompanied by severer torture, also had no appreciable result, in spite of the assertions of the anonymous chronicler. This obstinacy upset the Serdar's plans. To gain his end, and to make the prisoners come to an arrangement, he had them taken from prison and led round the whole town—probably having them scourged, according to custom, at each cross-road—and ordered that a large quantity of straw should be heaped up outside the town, on which he threatened to burn the prisoners alive, if they did not confess the crime of which they were accused¹. Torture and threats had their effect. The fear of certain death must have forced a confession from one of them, who must have acknowledged himself guilty, not of murder, but of complicity after the event in throwing the body on the highway, for payment, which lessened moreover his responsibility. The others must have followed his example, with the exception, however, of Leiba, probably the richest Jew in Onitzcani, and perhaps even the staroste of the Jews, whom the accusers desired at all costs to represent as the chief perpetrator of the murder.

We cannot allow either that the Serdar brought the matter before the Prince immediately, and that the accused persons, together with their families—and not only their wives as the anonymous chronicler has it—were forthwith transported to Jassy. This mode of action would have been opposed to the interests of the Serdar, even if he had not been the instigator of the affair, and it would have been equally opposed to all that we know of the customs of the time. Public officers were not so disinterested; they were not so ready to let go their hold, especially when Jews were in question. It is more probable that the case was only brought before the Prince by the request of the Haham-

¹ *Chronicle*, II, p. 362 and note.

basha and the chief Jews of Jassy, who, warned by what was happening at Onitzcani, laid the matter before the central authorities; they were confident that they would be able to have the accusation more thoroughly inquired into at Jassy, far from local prejudice, and hoped no doubt that neither the Prince nor the boyards, however greedy and rapacious they might be, would dare to push the accusation to an end and to engage in an undertaking which might cost them dear. What gives us reason to accept this hypothesis is that—contrary to what the account of the chronicler would lead us to believe—the case was not dealt with so vigorously and so quickly. It lasted three or four months. This allowed the Jews of Jassy, who were themselves later implicated in the charge, time enough to give information to their co-religionists in Constantinople, and to request their intervention to obtain the release of the prisoners. The visits also which the Prince himself paid nightly to the accused could not have begun immediately on their arrival at Jassy. Faithful to his usual tactics, the Prince must have had the case protracted in order to allow Panaioti, whose character we have sketched above, and also two of his Greek advisers—Doctor Caradja and the Postelnic Iordaki—to negotiate with the Jews of Jassy, and to discuss the amount of the sums which were to be extorted from them. These parleys must have lasted a considerable time, so that Raphael, the confidant of the Grand Vizier, had time to make a friendly application to Racovitza. The excesses which were committed against the Jews of Jassy, which we shall speak of later, must only have taken place after this intervention had completely failed.

Until quite recently, the two versions of the chroniclers, quoted above, were the only sources of information in our possession with regard to this monstrous accusation directed against the Jews of Onitzcani. And although the accounts, as they have been preserved to us, contain in themselves clear proof of the inanity of the accusation and of the

motive power which gave it origin, yet a certain obscurity reigned over the whole affair. In spite of the pious indignation of the chroniclers, who blame Racovitza for his want of zeal for religion, and who protest against the impunity assured to the guilty persons, it was easy to see that there must have been certain undercurrents, which the chroniclers have taken good care not to make known, and that other incidents of still greater importance must have occurred at that time at Jassy. We understand up to a certain point, how the Jew Leiba, in whose house the crime was said to have been committed, was not condemned and put to death, given his denials and protestations of innocence. It is more difficult to account for the indulgence of the Prince and the Divan to the self-accusing culprits, who, we are gravely informed, confessed their crime at Onitzcani in the presence of the Serdar Lupu, and at Jassy in the presence of the Prince and also the Divan.

The condemnation and execution of these men who acknowledged their guilt would not have prevented the Prince and his advisers from extorting money from the Jews. The confiscation of the condemned persons' property would have lawfully brought the Prince large sums. It is also difficult to explain what part was to be played by these same culprits, when they were stripped and placed before the synagogue to assist at the torture inflicted on Leiba.

As no sentence had been pronounced in the public Divan, we must rather suppose that the prisoners had withdrawn in open court the avowals which it is asserted were forced from them at Onitzcani and in the obscurity of the dungeon at Jassy. This must have complicated the case. The Prince and his advisers had gone too far to draw back. They had recourse to violent measures. The population of Jassy was stirred up against the Jews; the synagogues were sacked, the scrolls of the law were burnt, and by this riot, the Prince recovered the ground which he had lost. It must have been at this point that the bastinadoing and scourging occurred, administered not only to Leiba but also to the

other prisoners, and certainly to some of the chief Jews of Jassy. To escape these tortures, the Jews must have promised to pay large sums as a ransom.

In fact, we possess at the present day more authentic documents, which, without enlightening us as to the origin of the accusation and the heartrending scenes of which it was the cause, put it before us in quite a different light, and determine us on certain points which the accounts of the chroniclers leave doubtful.

The most important document comes from the French embassy at Constantinople. It is a dispatch which d'Usson d'Alion, entrusted by France with the duties of mediator between the Russians and the Turks, addressed to the minister of foreign affairs on June 29, 1726. It is fairly circumstantial, and is worth reproducing *in extenso*. It is undoubtedly the summary of a detailed report which the embassy must have received from one of its agents resident in one of the Roumanian principalities:—

“The Ministers of the Porte, Monseigneur, have been engaged lately in hearing the complaints of the chiefs of the Jewish Community. Michel Racovitza, Prince of Moldavia, receiving an outrageous charge which avarice has so many times directed against the unhappy Jews, has accused those who are in his principality of having murdered a Greek child in order to put his blood in their unleavened bread, and on this pretext—like a new Attila—he has destroyed their synagogues, burnt their books, bastinadoed the pretended criminals, and put them all under contribution. This Prince must know that this idea has become ridiculous in civilized countries, and if he were versed in history, he would know that the Gentiles reproached the first Christians, whom they called *Edipodez*, with the same thing. He wished apparently to imitate Ali-Pacha, who was surnamed the Demon on account of his cruelty, and who was killed in the last battle of Petervaradin. This vizier had resolved to drive all the Christians from the Ottoman Empire, and to begin by driving the Jews out.

To remove the difficulties which might be in the way of this plan, he sought to inspire the people with a horror of this nation, and with this design, he caused two or three Jews to be accused of having carried off a young Emir, or descendant of Mahomet. These unfortunate men found no mercy before a judge who was secretly their accuser, and they were condemned to be hanged¹. A barbarous policy influenced the vizier, and cupidity has influenced the Prince. I do not know if his end will be more fortunate than that of the unhappy Haman. The Jews, who are powerful, are making every effort to obtain a vengeance great enough for the offence²."

A report, similar to the one which was addressed to the French ambassador, must have been sent to the bailo of Venice, who, in his report to the Doge of October 26, 1726, states that a capigi had been sent to Moldavia to depose Prince Michel Racovitza and to take him to Constantinople. This report adds that this deposition was caused by his bad conduct, and that the last complaint against him was that he had been guilty of an utter calumny against the Jews and of heavy extortion from them³.

To explain the attitude of Racovitza towards the Jews, the anonymous chronicler, after censuring his conduct, tells us that his action had been thoughtless. "He had not foreseen the result of his action." This justification does not seem to us to agree with the facts. Racovitza must have expected that the Jews, ill-treated and oppressed, exposed to an accusation of ritual murder, which rendered their position intolerable, would lodge a complaint against

¹ See on this subject Hammer (*History of the Ottoman Empire*, Fr. ed. XIII, p. 285). The three Jews hanged in 1715 were accused of having enticed into a house a boy six years old, son of Kihaya-Bey, on the pretext of offering him some fruit. Hammer says that there was no other proof against these men than the evidence of this child.

² Hurmuzaki-Odobescu, *Documente*, Supl. I¹, p. 455.

³ Hurmuzaki, *Documente*, IX¹, p. 612. Si vuole che l'ultimo colpo che gli derivasse è dalle indolenze degl' Ebrei, che l'imputarono di una vera calumnia e di una gravissima estorsione sopra di loro.

him at Constantinople, and that they would find powerful support in their influential co-religionists in that town. The expectation must have become certainty when Raphael, the confidant of the Vizier, addressed him, at first in a friendly manner, probably before the synagogues had been destroyed or the scrolls of the law burnt. Avarice and greed alone cannot explain this conduct, any more than the thoughtlessness suggested by the chronicler. Any step taken at Constantinople was certain to be fatal to the Prince, the more that he had completely offended Nicolas Mavrocordat by receiving the fugitive boyards of Wallachia, and that Gregory Ghica, dragoman of the Porte, a relation of Mavrocordat, who had laid a claim to the throne of Moldavia, was, as he knew, working strongly against him. It must be admitted therefore that he trusted too much to his wealth to calm at need any indignation on the part of the Turks which might be excited against him. But he must have counted above all on the example given by the Vizier Ali-Pacha in 1715, and which he proposed to follow. Racovitza was the protégé and friend of Ali-Pacha, and must have taken literally the fable which the Vizier invented against the Jews, and the story of the thousand purses which the latter had promised to pay the Imperial Treasury, if another case of ritual murder should occur in the Turkish Empire. For six years he had had no personal contact with the pachas of Constantinople, and he certainly had a mistaken impression of the sentiments of the Vizier in office at the time. As soon as he could see a good way of bringing strong pressure to bear on the Jews by means of the crime of which he accused them, he hastened to inform the Vizier of the matter, that the latter also might profit by the opportunity to make arrests among the Jews of Constantinople and extort large sums of money from them¹. It is easy to see therefore why he paid no attention to the warnings of Raphael. He was deceived in

¹ Ioan Neculce, *Chronicle*, II, p. 363.

his expectations, his machinations failed ; together with his followers, he was obliged to give up his booty, and he fell by the combined efforts of the Jews and the princes Mavrocordat and Ghica. A tchaouch of the Porte arrived at Jassy on September 25 (October 6), 1726, with a firman of deprivation, and, five days after, the Prince was taken to Constantinople¹. There he was arrested and accused. He was called to account for his conduct and his extortions², and all his ill-gotten possessions were confiscated.

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PARIS, *October*, 1902.

¹ *Chronicle*, II, p. 363 ; III, p. 141.

² Hurmuzaki, *Documente*, IX¹, p. 613.